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CBC Newsletter

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For members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., Ornithological Society of the Carolinas

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CBC Spring Meeting - Hendersonville, NC

Ron Clark

Editor's Note: The CBC Spring Meeting originally scheduled for Hickory, NC has been moved. The new location in Hendersonville promises access to some of the most famous spring birding locations in the state. We hope to see you there!

The 2014 CBC Spring Meeting will return to Hendersonville, nestled in the foothills of North Carolina with easy access to the mountains and river of migrants that follow the Blue Ridge north each spring.

With trips visiting well-known and productive birding locations including Jackson Park, Hooper Lane, and the Blue Ridge Parkway, this is a meeting you won't want to miss. The dates are Friday and Saturday, May 2nd and 3rd, perfectly timed to see the widest variety of resident, breeding, and migrant birds.

Hendersonville, just 20 miles south of Asheville, offers easy access to a variety of historical and cultural attractions for the birder and non-birding partner alike. These include the world famous Biltmore House, America's largest private residence, as well as the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site, the Flat Rock Playhouse, and more.

Birding trips will visit Chimney Rock State Park, sites in Pisgah National Forest, the Blue Ridge Parkway, South Mountains State Park, and others, including the aforementioned Jackson Park and Hooper Lane, two of the best known migrant viewing locations in western North Carolina.

When we last gathered in Hendersonville in the spring of 2007 we finished the weekend with 168 species, including 34 warblers. Red-letter birds included Black-billed Cuckoo, Pacific Loon, Baird's Sandpiper, Red Crossbill, Dickcissel, Sedge Wren and Lincoln's and Grasshopper Sparrows. While there is no guarantee on what will make an appearance this time, you can see that the possibilities are impressive!

Our host hotel will be the Best Western Hendersonville Inn, located at 105 Sugarloaf Road. This is just off Exit 49A on I-26. The area around the hotel offers a wide variety of dining establishments from the quick and casual to the fancy and elegant. To make your room reservations, call 828-692-0521, extension 266. The CBC rate of $79.99 plus tax is good for rooms with two doubles or one king bed. Breakfast is included. Be sure to mention "CBC" to get the special rate.

Interesting programs are planned for both nights. Instead of a Saturday buffet, we will have a dessert social catered by Elijah Mitchell Audubon Society. This is a great chance to mingle with and meet other members, while enjoying some tasty goodies. We hope you'll join us in Hendersonville and enjoy the beauty of spring in the NC mountains!

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A Story of One Earthworm

Patti Newell

I'll start this article out with the cliché of fall leaves. Deciduous trees of many species make their transformation from that bright Southern green foliage to reds and yellows and oranges every year. Okay, so it may not be quite as intense as perhaps the Canadian fall foliage, but the change still symbolizes the beginning of our fall here in the South and with it, the migration into our area of many birds escaping those cold northern winters. Here in the South, we have more species of deciduous trees than in the Canadian North, which can boast of only one native oak species and a few birches, maples, and aspens. We even have many species of oak in the South that can grow in suburban areas. Maybe you have native oak species in your yard? Southerners plant Post Oak and Southern Red Oak and Water Oak and Willow Oak and Pin Oak and Scarlet Oak… and the list goes on! And each tree, one after the other, loses its offering of shade to us and transfers its wonderful thermal properties to organisms of the soil each fall, not to mention providing a bounty of nuts for animals that consume tree mast in the fall and winter.

Having slept through the dry part of the summer, an earthworm now awakens to the newly provided shade of leaf-fall and wiggles its way to the upper layers of the soil. It is the wet season now, time to disperse, reproduce, and forage. And the newly fallen oak leaves, its favorite food, also provide shelter from predators and the heat of the sun. The leaves covering the ground are just as beautiful as they were before they fell from their twigs; now they are just arranged on a single plane on the ground.

This earthworm and its kind will slowly forage on these fallen oak leaves as they decompose throughout the winter, retreating during cold, dry spells and proliferating during warm, wet periods. The worms are happy as long as they have food and shelter and are not eaten by their main predator, birds.

Yes, winter is a dangerous time for an earthworm. Many ground-foraging birds are flipping through the leaf litter, in hopes of finding their desired food, invertebrates of any kind. American Robins, Rusty Blackbirds, Common Grackles, Brown Thrashers, Northern Cardinals, thrushes, Blue Jays, sparrows, towhees, flickers—all of them would like to have a nice juicy earthworm meal. The more leaf litter, the more chances for a meal for all the birds trying to make it through the most limiting time of the year, winter.

But over the past fifty years or so, it has become common practice for homeowners to rake up or blow away fall leaves as being unsightly, though they offer a smorgasbord of invertebrates and other food for birds. One of the best things we can do for wintering songbirds in suburban areas, which are still important wintering habitat for many bird species, is to provide habitat and a source of food for the things birds eat, like invertebrates of the ground. So if you would like to justify not raking up or blowing your leaves this winter, this is your chance to be lazy! You are conserving birds! And if you are thinking of planting a tree, think about making it an oak that provides a favorite food of invertebrates as well as acorns for other mast-eating species. Happy bird feeding!

South Carolina Bird Record Committee Update

South Carolina's Bird Records Committee is charged with keeping the official South Carolina state bird list, as well as voting on records of interest. These records typically includes sightings that would add species to the official list, first records in each of the state's three provinces (coast, Piedmont, and mountains), and records of birds significantly out of season or for which the number of individual birds reported is deemed significant. Chris Hill of Conway recently took over the reins as chair of the committee. The committee's current membership includes Giff Beaton, Jeff Click, Aaron Given, Lex Glover, Keith McCullough, Irvin Pitts, Will Post, and Steve Wagner, in addition to Chris.

Texas Bonus Trip Report

Ron Clark

Eight CBC birders went to Texas for a week in November, starting in San Antonio, going down the coast to Brownsville, and then west along the Rio Grande to Laredo. The trip wrapped up with a stop in Rockport for a Whooping Crane tour. We got a 5:30 a.m. start from San Antonio to get to fields below Kingsville, hoping to find roosting Sandhill Cranes and geese before they took off for the day. We found a nice group of cranes and about 80 Greater White-fronted Geese, missing Snow and Ross's, but found a flock of Snow Geese later that day. Along the interstate we spotted our first of many Crested Caracaras.

We stayed on back roads, adding more birds to our list as we worked south to Hwy 77. Sarita Rest Stop produced the first of many Green Jays, and was good for Brewer's Blackbird. Turning east, we tried for Mountain Plovers, but the field roads were too muddy, and we turned back. The thought of getting a 15-passenger van stuck and then trying to explain the location to AAA was too much! After a quick lunch in Rio Hondo, with a Curve-billed Thrasher in a brush pile, we took Hwy 106 to Laguna Atascosa NWR, one of the better spots for Aplomado Falcon. While stopped along the road, we noticed a Caracara chasing a falcon. When the dust settled, we found both birds on the ground. The falcon was an Aplomado, which gave us good scope views. The drive also got us White-tailed and Harris's Hawks, and White-tailed Kite.

Altamira Oriole

The lake at Laguna Atascosa gave us many of our waders, shorebirds and ducks, with Reddish Egret and Long-billed Curlew in the mix. A Greater Roadrunner graced the parking lot, and our first Altamira Oriole was spotted in a tree as we drove out. On South Padre Island we added our only Franklin's Gull and a late Dickcissel, plus terns, gulls, and ducks. While on the boardwalk, I ran into a friend who was at the festival going on in Harlingen. He told me about the "Bird of the Trip", an Amazon Kingfisher, only the 2nd ABA record, that was found earlier in the day. While too late to go that evening, we made the "arduous" 20-minute drive the next morning. Sometimes you're just in the right place! We joined a very large crowd searching along the resaca. The kingfisher was finally spotted, and we all got great looks. Big checkmark!

Sabal Palm Audubon Sanctuary and Estero Llano Grande State Park added Texas specialties including: Couch's Kingbird, Least Grebe, Green Kingfisher, Great Kiskadee, Ladder-backed and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, White-tipped Dove, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Clay-colored Thrush, Long-billed Thrasher and Olive Sparrow. An evening visit to Oliviera City Park in Brownsville gave us Red-crowned Parrots and Green Parakeets. What a wonderful racket!

At Estero Llano, folks enjoyed flocks of Plain Chachalacas and both whistling-ducks. Most years Common Pauraques roost along the trails, but after spending 20 minutes looking near a "stakeout" we had nothing. We rechecked other likely spots, getting excited at a likely candidate that turned out to be a piece of wood in the shadows about 20 feet back. One of those wood birds! As I stood there, I looked to my right and there one sat, in plain sight, about five feet away! Those Pauraques…

We had an interesting time at dinner that evening. One person wanted fish, so we left it to him to find a restaurant. Using his smart phone, he called out directions. When we got to the address, no restaurant could be found. He quickly found another. We drove there to find a parking deck. He was relieved from duty in shame, and another took over. That restaurant didn't exist either. With three strikes, I headed for the inter-

(Continued on page 7)

CBC Visits North Carolina's Outer Banks

Steve Shultz

The Outer Banks of North Carolina provide birders with year round opportunities to enjoy birds in one of the state's most spectacular natural settings. But winter arguably shines as the brightest of the seasons. Flocks of Tundra Swans and Snow Geese replace crowds of sun-seeking tourists. Mosquitoes take a short break before returning in spring to greet visitors. Yes, the period from Thanksgiving to Martin Luther King Day may be the best of the best on the Banks.

Members of the Carolina Bird Club gathered at the Bodie Island Lighthouse early in the morning of November 30th to see what avian bounty could be found on the impoundments, ponds, puddles, sound, ocean, shore, and dunes. Saturday was devoted to visiting areas near Oregon Inlet, birding locations that need little in the way of introduction. We sorted though ducks on the Lighthouse Pond, enjoyed the "large white bird trio" of American White Pelican, Tundra Swan, and Snow Goose at Pea Island, and scanned the ocean from several locations including Jeanette's Pier.

Highlights at Pea Island included five Brant arriving with skeins of Snow Geese, rafts of Redhead on South Pond, a Merlin perched nicely for viewing through our scopes, Bald Eagles resting on pilings, and a mink crawling out of the water. Ocean watching from the pier produced some of the day's best sightings, including wavy lines of scoters buzzing southward just beyond the waves, a handsome drake White-winged Scoter bobbing on the sea, and a Western/Clark's Grebe near the scoter. For some, the ability to watch a Humpback Whale feeding within sight of the pier was the non-avian highlight of the day. The whale's frothy blow could be seen on and off for more than thirty minutes as the "long winged New Englander" chased schools of baitfish with groups of Inshore Bottlenose Dolphins in attendance. At one point the whale's lunge feeding brought the massive jaws out of the water, and the low, bumpy back that gives this whale its name was often visible.

Tundra Swan at Pea Island - *Phil Fowler*

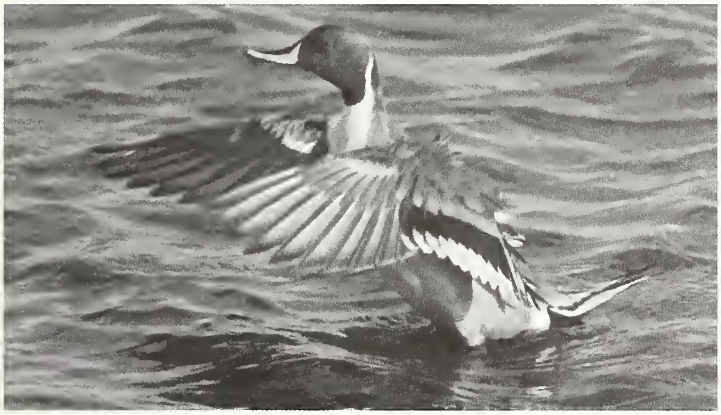
Snowy Owl at Cape Hatteras - *Phil Fowler*

Sunday dawned overcast, but without the fresh north-northeast breeze that made conditions on Saturday somewhat challenging. With reports of a Snowy Owl just 45 minutes away by car, the group overwhelmingly voted to change the scheduled itinerary and head south to Cape Hatteras. On the broad, sandy beach just south of the cape's point, a miniature, white R2-D2 was picked up in spotting scopes scanning the shore. Yes, that rotund character was the almost-famous Cape Hatteras owl. Not wanting to add undue stress to the majestic northern visitor's morning, the group remained well back from the bird, but constant traffic on the nearby public beach eventually convinced the owl to move to more private surroundings. Nearby, a trio of Snow Buntings put on an aerial exhibition for a few lucky birders.

Outer Banks

On the drive back north, a stop alongside Highway 12 opposite South Pond produced a lingering White-rumped Sandpiper, a life bird for several in attendance.

The trip ended in the early afternoon at Alligator River NWR. Here a trio of upstart River Otters threatened to push aside the rafts of ducks and swans for top billing. The trip ended with just over 100 species observed, which is not too bad considering that very few woodland birds made their way to the list. We may not have seen a cardinal, but we would gladly trade that sighting for those Snow Buntings!



Northern Pintail at Bodie Island - *Phil Fowler*

We hope to see you on a CBC "bonus trip" in the future; keep an eye out for new trip announcements in upcoming editions of the CBC Newsletter and on the club's website at www.carolinabirdclub.org

American White Pelican at Pea Island - *Phil Fowler*

2014 Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz

Judith Scarl

Citizen scientists such as Carolina eBirders helped contribute to a better understanding of Rusty Blackbirds on their wintering grounds through the Rusty Blackbird Winter Blitz from 2009 to 2011. (Learn more about Winter Blitz results at http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/research/rusty_blackbird/blitz_results.cfm)

Little is known about the **migratory** requirements and habits of this species, and citizen scientists can help again to answer important questions such as: Are there hot spots where many individuals congregate during migration? Are similar migratory stopover areas used by Rusties each year? Are important migratory stopovers protected, or might these areas be a limiting factor in Rusty Blackbird survival?

To address these questions, the Rusty Blackbird Working Group is bringing back the Rusty Blackbird Blitz for migration in March-April of 2014.

Please help provide information on Rusty Blackbird migration by searching for Rusties this March and April in any potentially suitable habitat and reporting those sightings to eBird. You can scout anywhere throughout the Rusty Blackbird's range, across the eastern United States, throughout the Midwest, and into Canada (http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rusty_Blackbird/id). This species can be found in some surprising places, so don't exclude places you wouldn't consider a birding hot spot. Rusties can be found in many habitats, from beautiful bottomland hardwood swamps, to waterfowl management areas, to pecan groves, to suburban areas and even horse pastures, so feel free to get creative in your search for this bird, it's easy! Bird as you normally do, but make a special effort to record Rusty Blackbirds and report your sightings to eBird. We look forward to hearing where you spot this elusive bird.

Wings Over Water 2013

Steve Shultz

In past years Wings Over Water faced a number of challenges including no access to Hatteras Island due to roads being under water, no access to Hatteras Island due to roads being under sand, and copious amounts of liquid sunshine. This year was different, for it was not Mother Nature that threatened to throw the proverbial primate's tool into the works, it was our friendly government. With 70% of the birding, paddling, photography, and nature programs on the Wings Over Water docket occurring on Federal land, the government shutdown raised the specter of having to find new locations for dozens of field trips. Fortunately, the government got up and running, and Wings Over Water enjoyed one of the best weather weeks in recent memory.

Trips ranged from far inland at Pocosin Lakes NWR and the catfish ponds near Plymouth, north to Mackay Island NWR, down the Outer Banks from Duck to Hatteras, and even across the inlets to Ocracoke and Portsmouth Islands. The earlier dates for this year's festival meant that a number of waterfowl, including the crowd-pleasers like Tundra Swan and Snow Goose, had not yet arrived, but trips to Lake Mattamuskeet and Pea Island NWRs turned up reasonably entertaining waterfowl including the regal drake Eurasian Wigeon feeding in New Field Pond (Pea Island).

The earlier dates may have helped bolster shorebird numbers, and trips to coastal locations found an enjoyable assortment that included Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, White-rumped Sandpiper, and more. Once again the flooded fields along River Road in Alligator River NWR provided excellent views of numerous shorebirds, including made-for-photo-op looks at Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs foraging together.

WOW participants enjoy "railing" at the Bodie Island lighthouse pond.

The early dates also meant a number of lingering warblers were to be found, and no less than fifteen species were located. This included a pair of Nashville Warblers that gave great views as they foraged day after day in the same row of ornamental trees at the Duck town hall.

This year's keynote speaker and special guest trip leader was Greg Miller, known to readers of Mark Obmascik's book, *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession,* as one of three birders undertaking an epic challenge in an attempt to break the standing North American big year record. Miller offered seminars on "how to be a luckier birder", shared secrets on using eBird data to plan trips and know what birds to expect, and provided a heartfelt, funny, and engaging keynote speech on the festival's final evening.

Look for 2014 dates to be released soon!

Welcome New Members!

The CBC welcomes the following new members.

Claire Herzog
Sarasota, FL

Lee Weber
Charlotte, NC

Patty & Tom Campbell
Chapel Hill, NC

Jeff Maw
Mooresville, NC

Jennifer Rose & Tony Rush
Anderson, SC

Tanya Jackson
Robert Beck
Boone, NC

Susan Alden
Dana McDonald
Hillsborough NC

Barbara Blaisdell
Wake Forest, NC

Karen Gross
Jefferson, NC

Ashley Meagher
Durham, NC

Cathy von Hassel-Davies
Kris Davies
Graham, NC

Carson Wood
Wilmington, NC

Peggy Cabe
Naples, FL

Virginia Holman &
Curry Guinn
Carolina Beach, NC

Ralph Hanline
Kings Mountain, NC

Frank Lawkins
Lexington, SC

Carol Tuskey
Hillsborough, NC

New Life Member

Jay Chandler
Hemingway, SC

Texas

(Continued from page 3)

state to read the food signs, hoping they were more updated. On the verge of passing out from hunger, we were finally successful, finding a Joe's Crab Shack.

The next two days included stops at Santa Ana NWR, Bentsen/Rio Grande State Park and Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, where we added Gray Hawk, Black Phoebe and other birds, and got better looks at many we had already seen. At Anzalduas County Park, our only Ringed Kingfisher was seen as it flew across the Rio Grande to perch on a boat house roof in plain sight… in Mexico! A Zone-tailed Hawk circled overhead, and we enjoyed a Vermilion Flycatcher.

On Wednesday, we headed toward The Streets of Laredo (luckily, no one sang the song), with stops along the way. Roma Bluffs didn't add any Texas specialties, although we did spot four young men paddling boats across to Mexico, where they hurriedly pulled their conveyances into the shrubs, nervously waving as we watched. I'm sure they were just practicing their paddling skills! The feeders at Salineno produced Jake the Wonder Dog, but not the hoped for Audubon's Oriole, although a Hooded Oriole made an appearance. The desert scrub of Falcon State Park added a pair of Pyrrhuloxia, but the famed White-collared Seedeater at the Zapata City Library was AWOL. However, we did find a female seedeater along the river at Lamar Bruni Education Center along with Pyrrhuloxia, Couch's Kingbird, White-tipped Dove and Great Kiskadee.

Crested Caracara

We then headed for Corpus Christi. The road across this part of the state is a virtual Raptor Alley. We saw at least thirty, including over twenty Caracaras before stopping at a few sites in the Port Aransas area, picking up more ducks and waders.

We spent Friday morning on a Whooping Crane boat tour. Our total for the three hours was 18, including one juvenile. Along the way, we had Long-billed Curlews, Neotropic Cormorants and nine more Sandhill Cranes, plus 32 more species of the birds you usually find around water. A run to Aransas NWR for lunch and a few last hours of birding added two more Whooping Cranes before we finished the trip and headed back to San Antonio.

I'm known to stop at a Dairy Queen or three on my trips. There's a little known law in most states that drivers of 15-passenger vans must stop for Blizzards whenever possible. This group, after the first stop, was way ahead of me by finding DQs coming up and guiding us in, stopping on five days out of seven! My kind of people.

It was a very good trip, and we finished with 161 species. Lifers ranged from 21-50. I got one, the Amazon Kingfisher, but as one of the group jokingly said, it wasn't my job to get lifers for myself! Thank goodness for rarities, so it wasn't a shutout!

The Newsletter and The Chat are online on the CBC website. The most recent editions of each are only accessible to CBC members. To access the "members only" content, you must first create a login and password. This can be done at http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/members/register.html. Once you have your login and password established, you can login at https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/members/login.html.

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Fall 2014 - Charleston, SC

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